

COMING OUT

Coming out is a journey, not a destination

Coming out is the process of recognizing one's sexual orientation or transgender identity and being open about it. Coming out involves two components: 1) acknowledging one's sexual orientation or transgender identity to oneself, or *coming out to yourself*, and 2) disclosing one's sexual identity to others, or *coming out to others*. Coming out to yourself is the first part of the journey. When an individual initially acknowledges to oneself that one's sexual orientation or transgender identity is different than the community norm, it is not unusual for that person to feel afraid, different, or alone. She/he may fear rejection by friends, family, or co-workers. However, coming out to yourself may also result in a feeling of validation of your self-worth.

After coming out to yourself, the next step is often coming out to others. "Others" may include other gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered people, family, heterosexual friends, co-workers, or the general public. Coming out to others is not necessarily an either-or process, but rather occurs on a continuum, from being out only to a few trusted individuals to being out in absolutely every setting or situation. In addition, coming out may elicit responses from others that range from wholehearted support to surprise, anger, or upset, and some may need time to fully understand and comprehend this new information about you. Some gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered people may have to worry about losing their jobs or being sexually harassed. Some people find it helpful to "test the waters" before coming out to friends and family. Many individuals consider coming out to others to be one of the most powerful things they have done. Research has identified a number of benefits to coming out, including a sense of relief, increased self-esteem, feelings of pride, and increased feeling of authenticity.

After you come out to yourself and others, you will still find that coming out is a lifelong journey that requires you to make frequent decisions about whether or not to come out to someone new. You will need to make coming out decisions at work, with regard to medical insurance, and in your place of worship. Coming out is a continual process.

